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Commitment to Antiracism



Boston Playwrights' Theatre (BPT) is a home for new works for the stage. We believe the successful development, production, and performance of new plays is key to continuing theatrical achievement in Boston and New England. We strive for, uphold, and defend antiracist values. In producing works written by our MFA students in Playwriting and by

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alumni or faculty of Boston University, we measure our success first by a generous dedication to our playwrights' visions.

BPT exists as part of Boston University and works within the English Department of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School. As a subsidiary of BU, Boston Playwrights' Theatre abides by its anti-discrimination policies, procedures, and commitments.

We believe in diverse representation of people and ideas in all facets of the work we do on-stage, off-stage, and in the classroom. Historically, our produced plays have been chosen through the lens of our MFA Program in Playwriting which, over decades, has admitted predominantly white writers with few BIPOC playwrights; we will heal this omission.

We also recognize that antiracism is intersectional. We support the uplifting of women and members of the LGBTQIA+ and disability communities in all of our work, though this document specifically focuses on commitments to BIPOC members of our community. For the purposes of the following commitments, our definition of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) is intentionally expansive and explicitly includes Latin/x and Asian people, *et al.*

We approach this work with humility and compassion, knowing that we have made and will make mistakes. We encourage feedback and have created a Google document for this purpose where future issues may be addressed personally or anonymously.

These commitments represent a "living document" that is continually evolving as we learn more.

To hold ourselves accountable in a more transparent way, the staff and faculty of Boston Playwrights' Theatre make the following commitments:

MFA in Playwriting

Founded by Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott in 1981 and subsidized by Boston University, BPT offers a three-year MFA in [Skip to Main Content](#) with the BU School of Theatre in the College of Fine Arts. we admit five playwrights to this program every two years.

- To insure a greater percentage of BIPOC artists in our cohorts, we commit to intentional future recruiting of BIPOC playwrights by publicizing our MFA program in universities and BIPOC communities in the United States and in the English-speaking world.
- We will address a diverse and BIPOC population of students in every year of our MFA Playwriting program. Because our on-stage programming flows directly from our students and alumni, this commitment is paramount. Having diverse representation in our writers results in diverse representation on our stages. We commit to a consistent and significant graduate student representation of BIPOC applicants in our incoming graduate classes, aided by the work of our Task Force in Recruitment (see below for more information regarding our Task Forces).
- We will hire a diverse pool of actors to help broaden the scope of our graduate and undergraduate classes, including BIPOC actors for every classroom visit. These actors help our playwrights bring their plays in development to life and are vital to the success of our emerging writers.
- When hiring for cold readings, playwrights will alert classroom actors to possible content challenges in advance.
- We will continue to pay all of our classroom artists equitably.
- We will not rely on the emotional labor of BIPOC artists to educate us about the BIPOC experience; we will orient our actors to this at the beginning of class.
- We recognize the need for our faculty and students in our MFA in Playwriting to be well-versed in the history, the lives, and the plays written by people of color, and we commit to diversifying our syllabi accordingly.
- To that end, we will celebrate playwrights of color in our syllabi and address traditionally marginalized voices, histories, and notions of theatre in our classrooms. We will include a significant representation of diverse-identifying and marginalized writers in assigned texts; this curriculum will be a “living” one and continually evolving.
- When teaching material or scholarship that emerges from a White or Eurocentric lineage, we will contextualize this work through an actively antiracist lens. We commit to seek training for our faculty and our graduate students in this regard (at BU’s Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground, with the Cultural Equity Learning Community, and with other TRD groups to discover them).
- We want our students to find BIPOC playwrights and in our productions; therefore, we commit to bystander training (for faculty and students) in order to address issues of bias regarding racial disparity. We will encourage the thought

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that theatre and academia are places where we may expand these difficult conversations and challenge what we think we know.

- We will bring in BIPOC educators/professionals every semester as guest artists to teach workshops and consult with our students in order to give them nuanced perspectives on the playwriting profession.
- When academic faculty positions become available in the English Department in Playwriting, we will actively recruit BIPOC applicants, aiming for a presence of BIPOC faculty reflective of the diversity of society at large.

Productions (MFA theses and alumni)

Each year we produce a season of plays comprised of MFA thesis productions of current students, or productions from BPT alumni. Thesis productions are composed largely of directors, designers, and actors from the Boston University School of Theatre. Alumni productions hire professional directors, designers, technicians, and actors.

- We will pay all of our professional artists equitably; we abide by our Most Favored Nations status and as a member of NEAT (“New England Association of Theatres”), SDC (Stage Directors and Choreographers), and Actors’ Equity Association (Tier A, Category 4).
- We will reach out to BIPOC communities in the Greater Boston area in order to extend our relationships to them outside of Boston University and to build our future audiences for new work for the stage.
- In the coming year, we will examine our ticket structure and discover how to make it more accessible for all audience members in upcoming Season 2021-22.
- We recognize the emotional toll on BIPOC artists existing in a white space. In support and reassurance, we will seek funding to hire Diversity Consultants.
- Where we collaborate with undergraduate and graduate students on our productions, we will work with our colleagues in BU’s School of Theatre to pursue diverse-identifying representation, not only on stage but on all production teams.
- We commit to responsible and compassionate time-management for all artists in rehearsal and production.
- We commit to expanding our production artists on all alumni productions with a goal of [Skip to Main Content](#) tion of BIPOC artists by 2023.
- We commit to acknowledging and recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ sovereignty in the first rehearsal and in the pre-show announcement for every show:

“We acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land where this performance is taking place and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. The land that we are performing on today is the traditional unceded territory of the Massachusetts Tribal Nation.”

- We will publish prominently and permanently in our lobby a description of how the theatre’s land was acquired and the history of the land with acknowledgement to the Massachusetts Tribe.
- We commit to honoring the Ponkapoag Massachusetts Tribe. We will research through BU and the Tribe appropriate ways to give back to their communities, which may include donations and/or free tickets and/or other measures.
- We will ensure that our public-facing staff are trained at the School for Public Health at Boston University in bystander intervention and anti-discriminatory practices for public performances.
- We will read out loud (and distribute in writing) antiracism and anti-discrimination protocols at all first rehearsals along with our protocols regarding Title IX.
- We shall make available cultural consultants to our playwrights and directors as needed to help realize our playwrights’ visions.

Boston Theater Marathon

The Boston Theater Marathon (BTM) is an all-day marathon of new 10-minute plays. The plays are chosen from more than 400 entries from New England playwrights, and the 50 selected plays are produced by 50 New England theatre companies who donate their time to this event. Generously supported over the years by the Boston University Center for the Humanities and by individual donations, the BTM gifts its net proceeds to the Theatre Community Benevolent Fund, an organization which helps area theatre artists and companies in crisis.

- We are assembling a Task Force to evaluate in future BTMs with the aim of significantly increasing participation at all levels. Some of the ideas we are considering include:
 - We will add a voluntary demographic question in the play submission form in hopes of clarifying the writers’ ethnicities and, thus, ensuring BIPOC

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participation.

- We will add those self-identified BIPOC playwrights (see bullet point above) and their plays to the final judging process for the next three years (until 2023) in order to mitigate unconscious bias among the judges.
- We will add readers to the final judging session of the BTM to attain a representative presence of BIPOC judges.
- We will actively recruit submissions by playwrights from various communities, universities, public schools, *et al.*, that may accommodate predominantly BIPOC writers.
- We will officially invite identifiable BIPOC playwrights to take part in the BTM every year in order to insure more BIPOC presence in the event.

Massachusetts Young Playwrights' Project

The Massachusetts Young Playwrights Project (MYPP) is a developmental program for Massachusetts high school students that sends professional playwrights to area schools to encourage the writing of short plays. This project serves hundreds of students from 24-30 high schools every year in and around Greater Boston. The program culminates in four-five full days of celebration with a total of 48-60 student-written 10-minute plays performed. All plays are directed and performed script-in-hand by professional actors and directors in collaboration with the playwrights.

- We will hire a diverse pool of playwriting mentors, actors, and directors for the Massachusetts Young Playwrights' Project, seeking to achieve a significant representation of BIPOC artists by 2023.
- We will hire more BIPOC mentors, both alumni or non-alumni of BPT, to teach in the MYPP (with a goal of achieving a major representation of BIPOC instructors within the next three years—2023).
- We will provide antiracist training information packets to all of our MYPP mentors.
- We will work to bring even more public and charter schools serving BIPOC students into the program.

General Commitments

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- We will continue to foster a safe environment for all of our diverse writers, actors, designers, technicians, faculty, and staff. At Boston University, we have access to Sexual Assault Response & Prevention (SARP), Behavioral Medicine/Student

Health Services (SHS), Disability & Access Services (DAS), and the Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground (HTC), among other departments, and these protective services will be publicized in our syllabi, in our production materials, and verbally by our instructors and directors.

- We recognize our privilege as a white-led theatre company and will continue to educate ourselves about racism and antiracist practices, about Title IX and sexual misconduct, and about equity, diversity, and inclusion; our staff (and MFA faculty) will continue to attend seminars offered at BU in the Office of the Provost (Diversity and Inclusion and Title IX) and in the newly-formed BU Center for Antiracist Research. Paid training sessions are being researched at the Interaction Institute for Social Change and with the Cultural Equity Learning Community.
- As we move forward with these initiatives, we are aware of the economic cost of training and re-orientation; we commit to the continued study of the systemic racism as it exists in our country and in the Theatre, and we will seek funding for our antiracism initiatives.
- We commit to anti-bias and/or antiracism training that specifically addresses the Arts and Theatre (most particularly with Facilitators Jacqueline E. Lawton and/or Nicole Brewer).
- We will not tokenize BIPOC by asking them to educate us about antiracism/anti-discrimination.
- To continue transparency, we will assemble an Antiracism Task Force made up of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters to help us continue to address racism in the theatre and to help guide us toward antiracism practices. We start with the following subcommittees to address specific areas of need: MFA Program Recruitment, Audience Development/Community Outreach, the Boston Theater Marathon, and Development/Fundraising.
- To ensure transparency, we will track data related to these commitments through self-identification surveys and other means, and we will report publicly on a biannual basis.

We invite conversation around these commitments and would be happy to discuss them with you.

Last updated: 11/10/2020

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05.25.2021—Update



On May 25, 2021, we paused Boston Theater Marathon XXIII: Special Zoom Edition to mark the one-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd and shared this statement.

05.06.2021—Update



Among the many topics discussed at our Advisory Board meeting were diversifying recruitment efforts for playwrights this fall and Boston Theater Marathon XXIII (a pause to remember George Floyd on May 25 and In Memoriam segment featuring Boston theatremakers).

01.25.2021—Update



We convened the first meeting of BPT's new Advisory Board, comprised of alumni playwrights and theatre community members who have long-standing relationships with and in-depth knowledge of our organization: Rosanna Yamagiwa Alfaro, Diego Arciniegas, Terry Byrne, Hortense Gerardo, Deirdre Girard, Adam Kassim, Greg Lam, Cliff Odle, Sarah Shin, and Michael Towers.

As a primarily white institution, it is critical for us to listen and learn; the Board will offer guidance on matters related to our Commitment to Anti-Racism as well as on other issues the theatre faces. The Advisory Board is compensated for this work.

Among the many topics discussed at the meeting was recruitment for the class of playwrights who will join us Fall 2022.

11.02.2020—Update



The staff of Boston Playwrights' Theatre, faculty from the MFA Playwriting Program at Boston University, and all current MFA Playwriting students (first and third-year) participated in a day-long Antiracism training with Jacqueline E. Lawton on October 31.

07.23.2020—Update

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The staff of Boston Playwrights' Theatre and faculty from the MFA Playwriting Program at Boston University have drafted a document that articulates the many *specific* ways we will work to become Antiracist, and how current students, alumni, collaborative

artists, and our audiences can hold us accountable. We are addressing bias in our work, education, and theatre culture.

We met on July 21, 2020, with a small group of concerned students and alumni to share our plans. After incorporating their notes, we will offer it to our full cohort of incoming and current students and alumni. We will then make our document available to our audience, supporters, and the public before the fall semester starts at BU: September, 2020.

Thank you for walking with us.

Black Lives Matter.

Darren Evans

Gary Garrison

Melinda Lopez

K. Alexa Mavromatis

Ronán Noone

Jeffrey Petersen

Kate Snodgrass

06.03.2020—For Our Current and Future Students



For our current and future students, and alumni of Boston University's Playwriting Program:

We stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter.

We grieve for the lives lost to police violence.

We support peaceful protest here in Boston, Minneapolis, Louisville, Atlanta, and across the United States and the world.

We educate.

We write.

We vote.

We hear you.

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Kate Snodgrass, Ronán Noone, Gary Garrison, Melinda Lopez
Faculty, Boston University, Playwriting

06.01.2020—Black Lives Matter



Dear Friends:

“There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people.”

—Howard Zinn (beloved friend of Boston Playwrights' Theatre)

The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police, only the latest in a seemingly never-ending string of similar incidents, has once again highlighted the systemic racism and injustice in our society. Time and again, law enforcement personnel—representatives of our government—kill black and brown people with nearly universal impunity. These long-standing injustices have understandably boiled over into protest, some of the most widespread in the history of this nation.

Prof. Zinn goes on to say with great foreshadowing: “...when we stand up and speak out together, we can create a power no government can suppress.”

Speak out together, we must. As a theatre whose mission is the creation and nurturing of new plays, we are committed to bringing new voices to our community and to the world. We will not be “neutral on a moving train.” We are a family of artists who feel the need, now more than ever, to listen to and learn from those who are most affected by the systemic racism in this city and country.

In that spirit, we will be using our platform in this moment to amplify the voices in our community that are systematically and often institutionally marginalized. We'll start this week with BPT alumnus Cliff Odle.

We also encourage all of our friends and supporters to donate to the following organizations if you are able to do so:

Black Lives Matter

The Massachusetts Bail Fund

Communities United Against Police Brutality

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We see you, and we hear you. Black Lives Matter.

Boston Playwrights' Theatre

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